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THE PASSING OF
MOTHER'S PORTRAIT

~BY~

ROSWELL FIELD

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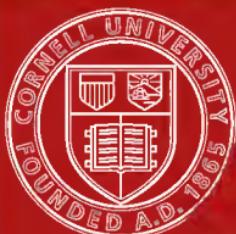


The passing of mother's portrait,



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No. 34

The Passing of Mother's Portrait

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BY
ROSWELL FIELD



Evanston
WILLIAM S. LORD
1901

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NOTE

The Passing of Mother's Portrait first appeared in an abridged form, in a recent number of the *Atlantic Monthly*. By the courtesy of the publishers of that magazine it is now reprinted, and restored to its original form.

The Passing of Mother's Portrait

I do not exactly remember when I came to understand that the little old lady sitting opposite me in the studio was my model. Portraits, you know, like children have their slow process of mental development, and I cannot say precisely when my period of infancy came to an end and was followed by unbroken consciousness. It seems to me that the artist was tinkering with a flesh tint on my right cheek when I first began to experience the joy of living and to take notice, with the liveliest curiosity, of the things around me. Certainly from that moment I grew greatly interested in the little old lady, and watched her with the keen delight that led me to suspect there was a bond of the most cordial sympathy between us. I fancy

that even the artist himself could not have been more solicitous for her physical condition or the requisites for a successful sitting. Instinctively, from time to time, I appeared to know when things were not going right, and often I have said to myself—with that consciousness I was unable to explain—“This is our off day,” or “We are not keyed up to it,” or “We shall have to do this all over to-morrow.” It is most extraordinary what a sympathetic understanding exists between a model and a picture. If artists only had a little of our sensitiveness, our perception of wrong conditions, how much time and fruitless labor might be saved!

The little old lady, as I now recall her with my added opportunities of observation in the world, was not beautiful, although she had a certain dignity and strength of bearing that greatly impressed me at the time. It was her habit to rally the artist on her plainness, at which I greatly wondered, and to ask him to deal

gently with the wrinkles which showed so plainly in her face and withering hands, for she was then about seventy years of age. I remember that she wore a funny old cap on her head, tied down under her chin with black strings; and that her gray hair was brushed rather severely down over her temples. Her dress was of black silk—it may have been alpaca—and a bit of lace was around her throat, fastened with a cameo brooch which seemed to me then the most beautiful of all possible ornaments. I recollect with what a thrill I felt the artist painting in the lace around my throat and decorating me with the gorgeous cameo, and how I marveled at the skill with which such splendor could be accurately reproduced. Everything was new and joyous to me, and I had that feeling of intoxication which comes to every picture firmly persuaded it is a masterpiece.

Notwithstanding the gentle dignity of the little old lady and her general air of reserve, there were times when she was

loquacious, and then I became familiar with our family history and picked up many points which were of extreme value to me at a later day. And as the work progressed, her daughter Caroline and her son-in-law George dropped in to make suggestions. And daughter Martha from the country, and a son from the West, and various other relations of near and remote degree, were summoned for consultation, and among them all I was subjected to many operations and alterations. My left eye was expunged and put in at least four times, and the expression of my mouth was changed to suit every individual taste. The artist bore with these suggestions with a patience that won my esteem and admiration, and I have never ceased to regard his profession with a feeling of the highest respect, coupled with the sincerest pity. But there is an end to all trials, even in a studio, and at last I was pronounced perfect and was borne triumphantly to my new home.

George and Caroline lived, as I am now aware, in a pleasant but unfashionable quarter of the city, but in truth—for it was my first experience with any habitation except the studio—the dwelling, humble as it was, impressed me as a veritable palace. And when, gorgeous in my gilt frame, I was assigned to the position of honor on the wall of the parlor just across from the upright piano, I was fairly swollen with my importance and puffed up with unreasoning pride. George, even in those days, was a young man of excellent business prospects, steady and industrious, fully ably to support in comfort his wife, her mother, the little old lady, and the two young daughters, Elizabeth and Bertha. Positively, to my inexperienced eye and modest taste, there was nothing left on earth to be desired.

Ah, those were happy days! The memory of them remains to cheer me now that my gilt is gone, my luster has vanished. Whenever a visitor would come to the

house Caroline would march her up in front of me and say proudly: "Did you ever see a more perfect picture than this of mother?" And the little old lady, with almost a girlish blush, would look up at me, and shake her head, and say deprecatingly: "Now, Caroline, if I were you, I wouldn't say anything about it." And I? Well, I was so pleased with the compliments, and with myself, that it was all I could do to keep from jumping right out of the canvas. Really you cannot blame us portraits for putting on a few extra airs occasionally. We do hear so much at one time and another that it is no wonder that our heads are turned, or that we droop with chagrin and humiliation. George—he was a jovial fellow, was George—quite fastened himself on my affections, for he often passed through the parlor when he came down to breakfast, and called out to me: "Hello, grandma," just as cheerily as if I were the real article, which, of course, just

then I was not. How I smiled back at him at those times!

I suppose things must have run on like this for about a year. One morning the little old lady did not join us as usual, and all that day and the next day, and through the week, there was a great stillness in the house. And one night I heard the sound of weeping upstairs, and very soon Caroline came down and threw herself on the sofa just under me, and gave way to her grief until George came in and very gently led her away. And two days later all the neighbors and friends assembled at the house, and when they left I heard the nurse tell the girl next door that they had taken the little old lady with them on her long journey. You see I did not know at that time what death was, and I thought it very kindly and beautiful to take such an interest in the journey of a friend.

With the passing of the little old lady, the gravity of my new duties began to

appeal to me more strongly. I may say that from this time I was awakened to a sense of obligation that I had not previously felt, and was drawn more closely to my family, whose temperaments and emotions I more clearly comprehended. I noticed also, with some perplexity, that I had aged considerably in my feelings, and that I seemed to be governed by a familiar spirit, and to possess an unaccountable knowledge of the past, a phenomenon in psychology I am entirely unable to explain. This sense of responsibility was materially intensified when Caroline, in her first moments of loneliness and grief, would stand before me with clasped hands and say mournfully: "You are all that is left to me of her." At such moments I tried to comfort her, and I really believe that in a great measure I succeeded.

We were all very happy together, and it was pleasant for me, after the children had gone to bed at night, to be in the little parlor with George and Caroline, and

hear them discuss our brightening prospects. It was becoming more and more evident that George was prospering in his business, for I noticed new furniture coming into the house, and I was much gratified to observe that when Caroline suggested improvements that appeared to me, with my old-fashioned ideas, outrageously expensive, George always cheerfully fell in with her plans, and good-naturedly humored her in every indulgence. The sight of so much domestic bliss was a perpetual pleasure, and often, after the family had retired at the close of a charming home evening, I confided to my little crewel friend and neighbor, God-Bless-Our-Home, my conviction that a happier group of persons and pictures never existed in the world.

I shall not attempt to dwell on the eight happy years I spent in the little parlor. It is true that from time to time I thought I saw a tendency on the part of the family to get away from the old traditions, but as Caroline used to say, "The world is grow-

ing, and we must grow with it," and the excursions doubtless were not so serious as I feared. I fancied too that Caroline was away from home much more than formerly, and I gathered from the conversation of the ladies who called in the afternoon that she had become a woman of considerable importance in the neighborhood, though I freely confess that I did not understand a word of their talk about clubs and papers and conventions and federations, and a hundred things that were never heard of when I was a girl. It was very hollow and profligate to me, and God-Bless-Our-Home quite agreed with me that mothers and wives could be much more profitably employed in their domestic duties. George, too, was more engrossed with his business, and presently I began to miss those cheerful evenings when we sat around in a cosy family circle, and talked shop or simple home pleasures. Elizabeth was now a handsome girl, about eighteen years of age, and two or three

evenings a week were surrendered to her and the young men who came with frequency and in great numbers. Their discourse was positively of the shallowest nature, and spoke of a vain and idle life utterly opposed to the ideas that prevailed when I first received attention.

One night—I think it was the first evening in six since we were all together in the little parlor—George said to Caroline: “Well, my dear, I closed the bargain to-day for the house on the avenue.” Such a scene of congratulation! Caroline embraced George, and George kissed Caroline, and little Bertha clapped her hands, and Elizabeth said: “Thank heaven, I shan’t be ashamed now to receive company.” I could not understand what the child meant, for to me nothing could be more beautiful than our parlor with its new furniture and spick-span rugs. I said as much to my neighbor on the left, “A Cloudy Morning on Lake George,” but he rudely laughed at me. “Cloudy Morning” was a super-

cilius fellow, who had lived several years in various rooms of an art gallery, and affected a certain superior air and knowledge. However, to be perfectly candid, I was as pleased as the rest, for I argued that if we could all move into a more spacious house, such as had been described, we should be the more contented to remain at home, and I was compelled to admit that we were beginning to get just a little cramped.

But that period of moving! Shall I ever forget it? For twenty-four hours I was lost in a blinding dust, and then for three whole days I stood up against the baseboard of the dining-room with my face pressed against the wall, utterly unable to see a thing that was going on. What I suffered during this period of retirement only a woman can understand. The din was terrible, and the humiliation of feeling articles of family use pressing against my back wore on my nerves. I certainly needed all the composure and serenity

of age to pass through that ordeal, and I fear that another day of torture would have led me to disgrace myself before the household effects.

It had never occurred to me that I should not occupy my old position on the parlor wall of our new home, and I was therefore much surprised and startled when I heard Caroline say: "What shall we do with mother's picture, George? Of course it will never do to hang it in the drawing-room." And Elizabeth exclaimed with more vehemence than seemed perfectly respectful: "Well, I should say not!" I did not know then what they meant by the drawing-room, but the imputation that any place was too good for me was not to be passed over without resentment, and I was furiously indignant, as any self-respecting portrait might well be. My son-in-law, George, acted as if he felt somewhat ashamed of taking part in such a disgraceful discussion, for he shrugged his shoulders petulantly, and replied: "O, don't

bother me with these little matters. You women must attend to all such things." Little matters, indeed! It was lucky for him that my back was turned, and that he could not see the fire that flashed from my eyes.

So it was finally decided that I should be hung back in the library, and, indeed, this was quite an agreeable compromise, for I found to my great pleasure that it was a most cheerful and inviting room, tastefully furnished, bright and cosy, and altogether relieved of that terrible primness and fashionable stiffness that characterized the parlor, or, as they called it, the drawing-room. "Now, this," I said to myself, "is something like. Undoubtedly this will be the family sitting-room, and here I shall be constantly with my dear ones, and removed from the presence of uncongenial visitors." For you must remember that of late I had grown distrustful of Caroline's acquaintances, many of whom were women of the emptiest pretensions and the shallowest intellects.

For a week or more I was quite happy and contented amid my new surroundings. Caroline had seen to it that I was carefully dusted, and that my frame was rubbed and scrubbed. And once or twice I thought I saw the old lovelight come back into her eyes as she looked up at me smiling down on the library table, but I dare say I was mistaken, for I was optimistic and credulous in those days and disposed to believe the best of my relations. And I fancied that George gave me a good-natured nod now and then, although he never said "Hello, grandma," as in the good old times. But one evening—George and Caroline had gone upstairs and I had composed myself for the night—who should follow Elizabeth into the library but young Mr. De Vivian. Now I never could abide De Vivian, who was one of these pert young gentlemen of fashion who assume that they adorn and honor every circle into which they are admitted, and who presume upon their

insolence to swagger before their betters. Why Elizabeth tolerated him I am sure I never could understand, for in my day he would have been laughed at for a fop and a dandy. Perhaps it was because he was descended from the De Vivians who had peddled their way to wealth a few generations before, but he made it quite clear that he was much prouder of his money than of the honest and industrious manner in which his ancestors had acquired it. For this reason alone any grandchild of mine should have despised him. Young De Vivian lolled in an easy-chair before the grate, and I caught him several times staring at me in the most impudent and offensive manner. You may depend upon it that I returned his gaze with a haughtiness that would have rebuffed a fellow less presumptuous and less self-satisfied. After one of my most scornful looks he turned to Elizabeth and drawled:

“I say, Elizabeth, who is the queer old party on the wall in the cap and sackcloth?”

Never in my life was I so angry. Never was our family pride so outraged, and I do not know what prevented me from stepping out of my frame and buffeting him then and there. But I controlled myself, for I was sure that Elizabeth would rebuke him with the greatest manifestation of displeasure, even if she did not rise and command him to leave the house and not return. Conceive, then, my amazement, my discomfiture, when my own grandchild positively blushed, and, nervously fingering a paper-knife, stammered—for the words must have choked her:

“That? Why, yes ; that, I believe, is one of mamma’s distant relations.”

And this from my granddaughter, whom, when a little child, I brought through the croup after the doctors had given her up—the baby I had watched and petted, the girl I had loved and guided! I suppose I was an old fool, but, do you know, at that moment something seemed to swim before my eyes; the whole room was blurred,

young De Vivian had vanished, and I was back in the nursery, crooning to a little babe and thanking God that so fair a child had been given to comfort us and make us happy. And I thought of the little old lady lying peacefully under the snow in the silent city, and I wondered if it is spared to her to know what is sometimes said of us after we are gone by those we have loved.

You may believe that I did not close my eyes that night, and I know that the strain must have told on me, for when George came down to breakfast he remarked to Martha, the maid, that the old lady—meaning me—looked as if she needed scouring. This may have been true, but I hold that it was not a gracious or considerate way of putting it, and I maintain that these little frivolities of speech, even from one's family connections, are much to be deplored and reprobated. I had thought it all over during the night, and I had come to the conclu-

sion that Elizabeth would be much ashamed of her conduct; so I was fully prepared to forgive her with all my heart at the first genuine manifestation of repentance. For I reasoned that she was young and thoughtless, and had been bullied into disregard of her own flesh and blood by young De Vivian, for whom my aversion was stronger than ever. "Her heart is all right," I argued, "and I must make allowance for a little foolish oversensitivity."

Elizabeth was in a frightful humor that morning, and I saw with many misgivings that the flippant remark of De Vivian had wounded her sorely. She looked at me viciously, by way of preparing me for the worst, and then she said to Caroline:

"Mamma, why don't you take that awful daub out of the library?"

I know very well what would have happened fifty years before if I had presumed to address such a suggestion to my mother, and I waited for Caroline's reply

with more anxiety for Elizabeth, notwithstanding her unbearable conduct, than for myself. I could hardly believe it was my daughter speaking when she answered in a tone of apology :

“I don’t think I should call it a daub, Elizabeth, but I must confess that it is pretty bad, and I quite agree with you that we should get it somewhere upstairs. It is certainly bad form, if not excessively vulgar, to flaunt one’s family portraits continually before one’s friends.”

“Particularly when they are such monstrosities as that,” said Elizabeth. “It humiliates me every time I invite anybody into the library and have to endure the look of amusement at the sight of that picture.”

Humiliated by the presence of her grandmother’s portrait! And it was only a few years since I had been thought worthy to hang in the parlor and to be admired by all the friends and neighbors!

“I dare say you are right,” said Caro-

line, "and we must have it moved right away, though it does go against my conscience"—she had a conscience, after all—"to seem to be lacking in respect to mother's memory. Perhaps it is more respectful to put it away where it will not excite derision. I think I'll have William hang it in my room. Family portraits are really much more in keeping in bedrooms."

"Mrs. Benslow doesn't keep her mother's portrait in the bedroom," spoke up little Bertha. "She has it hanging right in the front hall where everybody can see it the first thing." I could have hugged the dear child for her brave words.

"Mrs. Benslow's mother was a Colonial Dame," said Elizabeth; "that's quite another thing."

"I don't see what difference that makes," replied the stout little Bertha; "a grandmother's a grandmother, isn't she?"

"Yes, and a child's a child," said Eliz-

abeth, angrily, " and when you have grown a little more you will appreciate a good many things you know nothing about now."

" Well," went on little Bertha, defiantly, " I may grow a little more, but I hope I'll stop when I let fellows like Mr. De Vivian tell me how I shall hang my pictures in my own house."

" There, there, children," said Caroline, " don't say anything more about it. You are both right in a way, but Elizabeth is the older and knows the world better than you do, Bertha. I think we shall all feel much more comfortable when this subject of discussion is removed."

I fancy that Bertha saw the way I smiled upon her, and I believe that somewhere near the spirit of a little old lady was hovering to guard her from knowing that sort of world that cherishes its ancestors merely from pride of place and pomp of condition. But after William had taken me down from the library wall and hung me upstairs over Caroline's bed, I

felt my anger vanishing and I was easily persuaded that Caroline had reasoned well and that the atmosphere was much better and more wholesome. I found no trouble in convincing myself that at last I was where the old-fashioned grandmother should be, in the family circle and away from influences in which she could take no pleasure. And yet it was not long before I discovered that I was not wholly right in my conjectures, and that the bedroom of the fashionable present is not the old family gathering place of the past. I am compelled to admit that I was desperately lonesome, for Caroline used the room only to dress and sleep in, and as she was frequently away half the night, and was always tired and indifferent in the morning, the room, so far as any pleasure from her society was concerned, might have been barred and sealed up.

To add to my annoyance, the crayon portrait of George's Uncle Ben grinned at me from the opposite wall. Ben Chis-

holm and I were children together, and we had quarreled from the very moment we met. Even the marriage of George and Caroline did not harmonize our differences, for he had gone from bad to worse, and from a quarrelsome and peevish young man had developed into a cynical and crusty old bachelor. In fact, he was so thoroughly ill-natured and unpleasant that it was useless to attempt to get along with him. Up to this time Ben had always occupied an inferior position in the family, and I presume in his crayon coloring and round black walnut frame he would not have been tolerated had he not left George quite a sum of money when he died. It gave me a terrible shock, after all these years, to see him grinning and chuckling to himself, and I shall never forget our first conversation at the time of the unfortunate reunion.

“Well,” said Ben, after William had gone away, and leering most hideously, “you’ve come to it, have you?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said I, with just as much indifference as I could command.

“I guessed it was only a question of time,” went on Ben, ignoring my coolness and chuckling fiendishly. “Of course it was natural enough for you to suppose that the fate of an obstinate and disagreeable bachelor uncle could never overtake a nice, considerate, amiable mother, but I knew it was sure to come.” And he laughed so uproariously that he jarred a Madonna and two Magdalenes off their level.

“How dare you?” I exclaimed. I was beginning to lose my temper, for I understood very well what the fellow meant.

“O, come now,” said he, “don’t put on this haughty manner, for really you are in no position to affect superiority. I’ll confess that for a number of years you could afford to assume the grand air, but now that you’ve come down, or rather up, to my station, it is much more becoming

to accept your lot with dignity and composure—as I do, for instance.” And he grinned so maliciously that it made me just a little faint.

“I repeat,” said I, but with less confidence than before, “that I do not know what you mean by this gibberish about ‘fate’ and ‘time,’ and you will oblige me by stopping that grinning and chuckling and by behaving like a reasonable being.”

“Then I shall have to explain,” he continued, with such a frightful leer that the two Magdalenes shivered and huddled together, and the Madonna humbly cast down her eyes. “It is hard, isn’t it, for two respectable old ancestors to confess that they have been shoved out of the way because their family is ashamed of them?”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Pray don’t, by all means, if it makes you feel more comfortable. I didn’t believe it for a long time myself, though I had my suspicions from the start. You see, my

dear old friend, the unwelcome truth was fairly forced upon me, and I didn't begin with the parlor. Perhaps that is why it came easier to me. I started in the back sitting-room two months before the funeral, and went up on the second floor shortly after the will was read, notwithstanding my efforts to do what I could to help along the family. Isn't that amusing? You observe that I do not spare myself and run the risk of spoiling a joke."

"It is very likely," said I, "that the family was anxious to put you out of the way, for anything that would remind anybody of you must be necessarily painful." I spoke with as much sarcasm as I could command, but it did not seem to have the slightest effect. Ben Chisholm always was exasperating in his imperturbable malice.

"Yes, I was somewhat trying, I dare say, but their disposition of me does not explain, so far as I can see, why dear

mother should be shunted first into the library and then into an upstairs bedroom. That is what is worrying me, dear friend."

"You don't mean to insinuate"—

"I don't mean to insinuate anything. I mean to say with tolerable distinctness that our dear children have outgrown us. Jack, of course, fell down first, and Jill came tumbling after." And he laughed loudly at his coarse jest.

Happily for me, the conversation, humiliating as it was in the presence of the three strange ladies, was interrupted by the entrance of the maid, though I must say for the ladies that their sympathy was wholly with me, and that they have since acknowledged that for many weeks Ben Chisholm had kept them in a condition of terror by his ungentlemanly conduct, his ribald jokes, his boisterous laughter, his malicious remarks, and his perpetual trifling with the most sensitive feelings. This incident gave me fresh

occasion to wonder why people are so thoughtless in the arrangement of their pictures; why they will persist in associating portraits that are thoroughly uncongenial, thereby inviting strife and promoting unhappiness. I remember that "The Lost Lamb," who was my neighbor in the library, confided to me that for two years he had lived in unremitting agony because not ten feet away the art dealer, with whom he was living, had kept a pack of wolves. It is most extraordinary that the sensibilities of pictures are never taken into account, and that through ignorance we are forced to experience such wretchedness.

Now it would be useless to deny that the poison of Ben Chisholm's discourse had entered my system. Try as I might, I could not divest myself of the suspicion that there was much truth in what he had said, and that I had been put out of the way because I was no longer considered acceptable to a family that had made such

advancement in the business and social world. In vain I argued the baseness, the unreasonableness of such conduct; in vain I brought up a thousand objections to such an interpretation. Caroline barely noticed me, although I employed every artifice to attract her attention; she was so taken up with her worldly prospects, her clubs, her receptions, and her never-ending round of evening gayeties that I often wondered who was running the house down stairs, whether George had his breakfast on time, and if anybody was looking after the poor fellow's comfort. I do not know what would have become of me in those hours of distress if it had not been for the sympathy and soothing words of the Madonna, who constantly stood between me and the odious fellow, Ben Chisholm, and sustained me with much comforting advice and loving cheer.

The Madonna assured me that retribution would certainly overtake Ben, and that prophecy was speedily fulfilled; for

one day, when the maid was dusting the room, the sustaining wire broke and the crayon fell to the floor with a great crash. Caroline came hastily in, and perceiving a large rent over Ben's eye, peevishly told the maid to take that old picture out of the room and keep it out. And when the maid very naturally inquired "Where?" she said impatiently, "Anywhere." At this very climax of his misfortunes, when even I felt a touch of pity, Ben's malevolence did not desert him, and his wound served only to accentuate the devilishness of his leer. As the maid bore him away I could not refrain from looking at him—though more in pity than in satisfaction—and I heard him whisper: "You'll be next, my lady. It won't be long." I trembled so violently that I feared Caroline would perceive my agitation.

The days immediately following were very comforting and delightful after my unhappy experience with Ben Chisholm, for I had many and long talks with the

three ladies, and the Madonna never ceased to give me admirable counsel from her wonderful storehouse of knowledge. She spoke long and earnestly of the evils of wealth and fashion, of the temptations that beset the worldly rich, of the quickness with which a life of frivolity dries up the human heart. And she besought me to be prepared at all times for such changes in fortune, whether good or bad, as might be appointed. In truth I had learned to be quite ready for any emergency, for I saw that I had nothing to expect from Caroline but neglect, and as for others of the family they could not have avoided the room more faithfully had it been a pest-house.

For these reasons I was tranquil, even cheerful, when Caroline, suddenly pointing to me one morning, said to the maid: "Mary, you may take that picture down to-day, and hang it in the sewing-room." And yet I own that I had curiosity to know why this change was so unexpectedly

suggested, and in the few moments of grace I asked my friend, the Madonna, if she could venture any explanation. The good woman looked at me with an expression of ineffable sweetness, and said very sympathetically:

“I have told you, my dear sister, that when a woman is plunged into the vortex of fashionable life she quickly loses those finer sensibilities, those more wholesome emotions, which are the enduring charm of womanhood. She becomes the slave to worldly conventions, the prey to unworthy shame, the victim of an unwomanly dread of idle gossip and the sneers of the frivolous. Let us talk no more of this matter, and let me beseech you to continue to bear with fortitude the trials that may still await you.”

I perceived that the Madonna forbore to speak further out of regard for my feelings, and, indeed, there was little need of explanation from that source, for I soon gathered from the conversation of the maids

that Caroline was preparing for a grand evening reception, and that the room was to be given over to the women for the removal of their wraps and the putting on of the final touches. It came over me all at once that I was banished not merely because in my sober garb I did not fit in with such splendor, but because Ben Chisholm was right, and my family was ashamed of the comments of these worldly fashionables. That was what the Madonna meant by "dread of idle gossip," and that was why she had refrained from further explanation, and had bidden me summon my fortitude. Time was when I might have wept for such unfilial conduct, but how would idle tears have availed? And so I bore myself bravely with just that old dead pain at the heart I have never quite succeeded in banishing.

There was always something hopeful in my nature, and the more I looked at it the more I welcomed the change from the comparative loneliness of the bedroom to

the cheery society of the sewing-room. At least some members of the family would be likely to be visible at any hour of the day, and the fact that the telephone had been placed in that apartment was an assurance that I should keep up with all the proceedings of my dear ones—they were still dear to me in my calmer moments—and seem to have a part in their occupations and pleasures. For I may explain that the emotion of curiosity and active interest in affairs are not denied to us pictures; that we are sociable in disposition, and keenly alert to what is going on around us. I was vastly cheered, moreover, as Mary bore me to my new stopping place, to note, smiling at me from above the closet door, my little crewel friend, God-Bless-Our-Home, whom I had not seen for several years—in fact, since we were neighbors and cronies in the old-fashioned parlor. I had mourned her as dead, and here she was, a trifle weather-beaten perhaps, but otherwise as cheerful and stimu-

lating as ever. I greeted her with warmth, and when Mary had left the room I asked her to tell me how she had fared, and why we had never heard of each other.

“I know it is unbecoming to complain,” said my little crewel friend with a sigh, “but, as you are aware, it is hard when one has presided over a parlor, and stood for as much as I represent, even on my face value, to be exiled without a word of apology or explanation to a back room upstairs. I made the mistake of believing—possibly because I was young and brilliant, and confident of the strength of my sentiment—that I should at least outlive a generation and retain my supremacy. I did not take into account the fact that fashions change, that the world is growing more worldly, and that a principle that is appropriate enough for a modest family with religious leanings is hardly suited to the surroundings of persons of wealth and fashion.”

“Surely,” I exclaimed, aghast at this declaration, “you do not mean to say that

George and Caroline have repudiated you as an evidence of change of principle?"

God-Bless-Our-Home smiled. "No, I do not mean exactly that. I presume that if they were cornered by a direct question they would admit that they still respect the sentiment I endeavor to teach. But it is no longer customary in polite circles to parade ostentatiously, and every day in the week, an appeal to Providence. At least not in my kind of garb. Ben Chisholm—do you remember Ben Chisholm?"

I replied rather shortly that I did, perfectly.

"Ben Chisholm was here for a few days and he took a disagreeable and pessimistic view of it. He endeavored to convince me that such sentiments as I promulgate are all very well for the poorer classes who have plenty of time for religion, but are not even amusing to those who can hardly find hours enough in a day and night for what they consider more pressing duties.

And he dwelt rather maliciously, I thought, on the fact that my old place in the parlor is now given up to a painting wholly unscriptural and, I fear, not altogether decorous. But I prefer to believe that the shift was not so much the result of a change of heart as of the recognition of things in their proper places."

"And that is why you are over the closet door in a back room?" said I, with a touch of bitterness.

"Wherever I am," answered God-Bless-Our-Home very sweetly, "it is enough for me to know that I am not responsible for any failure of my mission, and that it is not my fault that there are other things more beautiful and alluring to the world than myself."

I was ashamed of my outburst and begged my little friend to forgive my hasty words. And I asked her to tell me about the sewing-room; whether Caroline and the girls assembled there for family consultation, and worked and talked together

as in the good old times when I was a girl just learning the domestic arts.

Again God-Bless-Our-Home smiled, but, it seemed to me, a little more sadly. "Times have changed, my dear old friend, since you were young, and you forget that necessity for labor with the needle no longer exists in your family. It is true that I do see your daughter and the girls occasionally, for they come here to be fitted, and then the telephone is always a source of distraction. I must say that I have no special fondness for gossip, and yet I cannot help overhearing much that is said, both pleasant and unpleasant. You know that it is through the sewing-women, who work by the day or week, that our fashionable ladies pick up much if not all of their general information on personal matters, and in this way I have acquired a stock of knowledge surprising in its extent if not in its accuracy."

And with this introduction God-Bless-Our-Home proceeded to regale me with

the choicest bits of family information. I heard how Caroline had become a woman of the most tremendous importance in club and fashionable life, and how she constantly berated George for his indifference to social affairs, and bewailed his indisposition to play an active part in the gay world in which she moved. I learned that George had accumulated a vast fortune, which served only to make him more restless and dissatisfied than ever, and that while Caroline and the girls gave themselves up to their pleasures he became more engrossed with his business, finding in the pursuit of wealth the greatest happiness. That Elizabeth had given her troth to young Mr. De Vivian pained but did not surprise me, but that the wedding had been put off until the family moved into the new house gave me much disquietude. I dreaded the thought of the fate in store for me, and with trepidation I communicated my fears to my friend.

“It is true,” said God-Bless-Our-Home,

“that our family feels that it has outgrown this house and its surroundings, and that it has made preparations to move into a more elegant home in a still more fashionable quarter of the city. I have heard Caroline say as much to her friends over the telephone, and George has frequently come in at night to call the architect and contractors to hurry them along with the work. I do not know what will become of us, but I try not to think of unpleasant things.”

Much more from time to time God-Bless-Our-Home told me of the family doings, and often I picked up interesting matter from the gossip of the sewing-women and the frequent conversations over the telephone. For Elizabeth was accustomed to spend many minutes, idly it seemed to me, in calling up young Mr. De Vivian and speaking of things of a most frivolous and empty character, such as I was ashamed to hear discussed in the presence of my little friend.

Thus several months went by without special incident, and we were beginning to think that possibly we were settled for the winter, when one morning Mary entered the room bringing our former companion, the Titian Magdalene. My pleasure at the sight of her was somewhat tempered by the discovery that she was in unusual depression of spirits, and was laboring with the most painful emotions. As often as I tried to ask the reason of her coming my courage failed; but I was not long kept in suspense, for, having partly recovered from her agitation, she spoke with great frankness.

“Everything is in confusion,” said the Magdalene. “The house is torn up; my sister, the Correggio, has been carried I know not where, and the Madonna is lying face downward on the bedroom floor. Strange men have entered the house, laying lawless hands on what they could reach, and it was through their carelessness that I received this abrasion of the skin

on my right arm. I know that a great upheaval has come into our lives and I shudder for the consequences to us all."

"Let us not be discouraged," replied God-Bless-Our-Home, with the utmost cheerfulness, "but let us hope for the best even when we naturally fear the worst. Perhaps it will not be so bad as we think, and perhaps we shall all come together in our new abode, for I see from what Magdalene tells us that another period of restlessness has come and that we must shortly go to another home."

The time was even shorter than she thought, for hardly had the words escaped her when the strange men broke into the room, and laid violent hold on us, and tore us from the wall, and bore us away down stairs where lay the Madonna in the shameful condition described by Magdalene, with certain secular and low-class prints and engravings piled ignominiously on her frame. I shall not linger on the disgrace and confusion of those awful

hours. Nor shall I dwell on the humiliating manner in which we were all jumbled into a moving van, wholly regardless of propriety and dignity, and jostled about in a most agonizing journey. I remember that the Madonna, covered with dirt and hardly recognizable in the accumulation of two days' dust on the littered floor, never lost her admirable composure, but earnestly besought us to be patient and to bear our misfortunes with humility. However, I could not refrain from crying out against the inhuman treatment to which family portraits and old and constant picture friends are so wantonly subjected.

When we had come to our journey's end and had been carried roughly into the house, which was indeed a palace in beauty and extent, the Madonna warned us to prepare ourselves for any indignity. "For I perceive," said she, "that this dwelling is on a scale of grandeur far beyond our condition." A malignant chuckle greeted this remark, most humbly and piously

uttered, and turning we saw for the first time that Ben Chisholm had been put down in our corner. Whereat we all shuddered.

“You ought not to expect anything,” said he coarsely, “you and those two women there, for you are only copies; but look at me. I’m an original. And yet I dare say that I have as little to hope for as any of you. But I don’t complain. I’m used to it and I know the people. You’ll allow me to add that it’s about time for you and dear mother to scrape up a fair knowledge of our precious family.” And he grinned so diabolically that we turned away sick at heart. There is nothing so terrible in periods of wretchedness as a malicious philosopher.

For thirty-six hours we lay on the floor, while one by one our companions were picked up and borne away. I was at the bottom of the heap with my face resting—not inappropriately, all things considered—on a scrubbing brush, and bearing

many grievous burdens, of the nature of which I knew nothing, on my back, when George contemptuously punched me with his foot and asked :

“ What are you going to do with all this truck ? ”

Think of that ! Mother’s portrait, a Madonna, a Titian, and a Correggio—truck !

“ I really don’t know,” answered Caroline. “ There is so much I wish we had destroyed or thrown away before we left the old place. Most of it is fit only for the ash-barrel.”

“ Here is grandmother’s picture,” said Bertha, vainly endeavoring to rescue me from the pile. “ I recognize the frame. Certainly you don’t mean to throw that into the ash-barrel.”

“ No,” replied Caroline, I cannot throw it away, although I sometimes wish I could. It’s an atrocious likeness, always was, positively too frightful to hang where anybody can see it.”

"I thought you used to like it," said Bertha, innocently. I believe I have said that Bertha was my favorite grandchild, and a girl of uncommon penetration.

"I never liked it, though I admit that I tolerated it before."

"Before she became rich and fashionable," said I to myself, bitterly; "why doesn't she finish her sentence?"

"So I think for the present," continued Caroline, "we'd better stow it away in a safe place. William, suppose you carry this picture up to the top floor and put it in the trunk-room. And while you are about it you may as well dispose of the rest of these old traps."

Indeed! So hereafter I was to be regarded a part of the "truck" and "old traps," a pretty ending of my dream of a happy and honored old age! As William took me out of the room I could not forbear calling out in my indignation: "Remember, Caroline, I am all that is left to you of her!" But if she heard me

she gave no indication, and, in truth, I am inclined to think that my reproach would have carried little weight, so completely had her nature been changed by the vanities and pomp of her new life.

Behold me then in the trunk-room, a good-sized but dark and poorly ventilated apartment just off the ball-room at the top of the house. The room was fairly filled with a great variety of household effects, which, I recall, were groaning and complaining loudly as William threw me somewhat contemptuously and very roughly into a corner behind a large box. I lost through this treatment quite a section of gilt from the right of my frame. It was altogether too dark to recognize my neighbors, still I knew that the Madonna and the two Magdalenes and God-Bless-Our-Home were my companions in exile, and it was not many minutes before I discovered that Ben Chisholm was in a distant corner, mercifully held down by two dress-suit cases and a steamer-trunk. But

nothing could repress that fellow's malevolence of spirits.

“And so we are all together once more,” he piped up in his shrill, squeaky voice. “Well, if this isn’t real pleasant and homelike! I’m sorry you ladies cannot get a better look at me—the lighting arrangements here are execrable!—for I think this new hole in my left arm would interest you. And just to think that after so many days and months of separation we should be reunited. Wasn’t it thoughtful of George and Caroline to arrange for this charming meeting? Do you suppose there is any danger they will tear us apart again?”

We were too much occupied with our own grief to answer, and after chuckling to himself a few minutes he went on:

“So this is the trunk-room and rubbish-closet. Isn’t it cozy in here? A trifle warm in summer, perhaps, but think how comfortable we shall be in winter. I hope you ladies don’t mind mice”—the Cor-

reggio gave a little scream—for I distinctly heard a mouse gnawing over by my right hand. Personally I don't bother about mice, but I have understood that women are afraid of them, and I deem it my duty to warn you in time. It seems rather strange that we should have everything possible up here except a mouse-trap. Perhaps if mother would speak about it to her thoughtful and loving daughter she would provide one."

This sarcastic reference to my unfilial child gave me a more bitter sense of my misfortune and excited the indignation of my companions, who violently reproached Ben for his ill-timed levity.

"What's the use of pretending to so much virtue?" he grumbled. "You all know that we are in the last ditch and have nothing to look forward to except the ash-heap or the kindling-box. Let us make the best of it while it lasts. At the worst we are next to the ball-room, where

we can hear the music, and at other times we shall have plenty of leisure for reflection over a giddy and more or less exciting past. I'm going to be philosophical, but I must confess that this steamer-trunk is uncommonly heavy."

There was a good deal of sense in what Ben said, and while I do not wish to give him credit for anything useful or helpful, he did, however unwittingly, cheer us up. He was right, too, in his conjectures as to the music, for Caroline began straightway a series of lavish entertainments, and three or four evenings of every week the strains of the dance came plainly to us, and the chatter of voices and the sound of laughter made us forget our isolation. At times I thought I could detect Caroline's voice, and her tones invariably set me to thinking of the quiet evenings in the little front parlor when *God-Bless-Our-Home* was the ruling spirit and when life was the brightest and happiest and best of all pos-

sible conditions. At these times I think I should have wept had it been possible for me again to weep.

But it must not be thought that we had seen the last of Caroline. I remember the first day she opened the door, and entering the room, began to peer around. My heart gave a great leap, and I thought to myself: "Perhaps she has come for me." In this I was mistaken, for after rummaging eagerly a few minutes—barely giving me a glance—she seized an old teapot of lacquered tin and bore it away triumphantly. Another day she came again, and this time she carried out an old-fashioned gilt mirror of the preceding century. To these succeeded a dingy pewter plate and a rusty sword, which, I remember hearing, her great-great-grandfather wore in the Revolutionary War. Then we realized that Caroline had become infected with the craze for antiques, and great hope sprang up in the trunk-room, and there was much speculation as

to our respective chances. Ben Chisholm, however, refused to be dazzled by the prospect. "Whatever happens, there's no show for you or me, old mother," he said gruffly. "We're neither one thing nor the other, and we'll be lucky if they let us stay on here. When we go out we go to the garbage-can."

I was not to be discouraged by this dreary croaker. It came to me how, when I hung on the wall in the library, my neighbor—he was one of the old masters; I cannot remember which one—told me he had lain many years in a dismal attic, wholly forgotten and unrecognized. And one day a strange man, prowling about, picked him up and carried him to the light and detected his almost priceless value. In a few hours he was in a brilliant room, eagerly stared at by hundreds of admiring connoisseurs of art. Whereupon I thought: "Why should not I have similar fortune? Why should I give way to dejection and hopelessness? It may be

true that Caroline is dead to me or I am dead to her, and that she and Elizabeth and Bertha, and their children, and their children's children, may pass away while I am lying forlorn and forgotten and covered with dust in this dark corner. But may it not be that in generations to come I too shall have a part to play and shall begin a new life? May I not be recognized as a forebear of a distinguished house, a Daughter of the Civil War, a Dame Before the Empire, and be carried proudly to the drawing-room or the most illustrious chamber to be venerated by my descendants and admired by their friends and kinsmen?"

In this timid hope and expectation I am living. When the house is quiet, and grumbling Ben has sulked off to sleep, and those of my companions who are left have found the sweet oblivion which comes to us all alike, I try to picture the glory that awaits me and to content myself with the belief that I shall be great and famous

and happy. But my heart keeps asking me, Will it pay? Is the flattery of future generations worth the few years of love that should now be mine? Will all the exultation I may feel in the ages to come atone for this bitter pang of knowing that those who are dearest to me rejected me? And constantly in these sad moments I am traveling back to the old-fashioned parlor, and I see the peaceful face of the little old lady as she looked that afternoon when they bore her away on her long journey. And my heart tells me that it would be far better to have gone with her, and passed beyond while love was strong and faith was unshattered.

PRINTED BY R. R. DONNELLEY
AND SONS COMPANY, AT THE
LAKESIDE PRESS, CHICAGO, ILL.
JULY, MCMI

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